

## Staying alive in Minneapolis' latest homeless encampment



By Reg Chapman January 19, 2024 / 10:27 PM CST / CBS Minnesota

MINNEAPOLIS – Camp Nenookaasi was shut down by the city of Minneapolis and on that same day many of the people living there moved a few blocks away to a lot on the Minneapolis' south side.

"About 110 residents that still stay here at Nenookaasi after the eviction," said Nicole

Mason.

For the past five months, Mason has followed people who live in this encampment. Then two months ago, she moved in to truly learn what is needed.

"To show that's what's good enough for my people is good enough for me and that we are safe here," said Mason.

Mason knows the road ahead will be rough.

"98 percent of the people who live here are currently, I'd say, 90 percent are using fentanyl," Mason said.

She is proud that in the last five months there have been no deaths from overdoses.

She says Narcan has saved 30 lives.

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"This is our prayer fire so they can put tobacco and say some prayers for the camp," Mason said.

The majority of people living here are Native and this is sacred ground. This encampment is in ceremony 24/7.

More than 110 people live inside the homeless encampment in about 20 yurts. They say this is their family and they gather here for safety.

WCCO Photojournalist Chris Cruz and Reporter Reg Chapman were invited inside

### CASE 0:24-cv-00001-ECT-TNL Doc. 57-3 Filed 03/01/24 Page 3 of 7

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Mason's yurt. They were met immediately with the strong smell of burning firewood and the warmth it produced.

"You can see it has hot coals inside and you just put in the wood. We cook on it, we make our tea inside of here," said Mason.

Mason agrees with many recovery specialists that this is not a homeless issue, it's an addiction issue.

"I think we have to address the issue of addiction and then housing," Mason said.

Treatment or well-being sessions are held daily.

"We also provide pre-loaded Narcan in safe spots so that it won't become frozen," Mason said.

While they work to heal people, plans are in the works for a new treatment center.

"But they named it the healing center and it's going to be a culturally based treatment center with lodging here in the city," Mason said.

But until then, this is home for a community trying to heal.

"My self and my friends, we're not going anywhere," Mason explained. "We are going to continue following them until we get this treatment center it so much needed for my people."

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#### Reg Chapman

Reg Chapman joined WCCO-TV in May of 2009. He came to WCCO from WNBC-TV in New York City where he covered an array of stories for the station including the Coney Island plane crash, the crane collapse on the city's east side, 50 shots fired at motorist Sean Bell by New York Police, and a lacrosse team assault at Fairfield High School in Connecticut.



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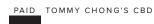
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7 of 7